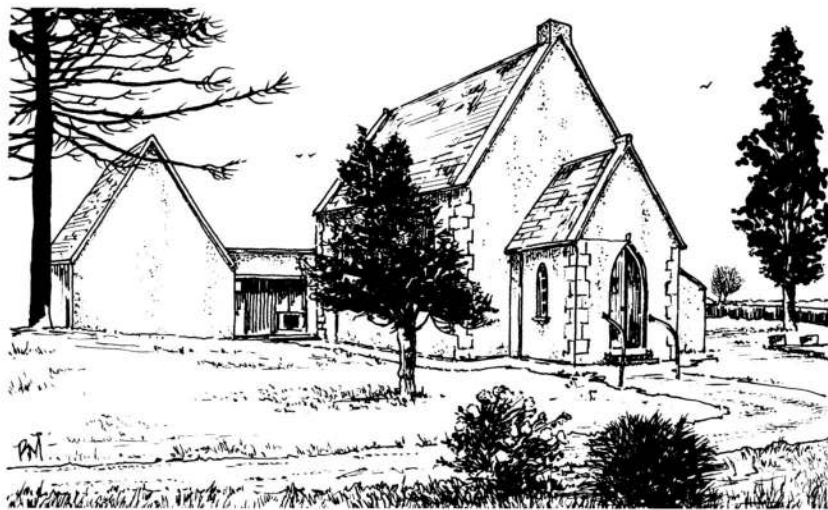


ROUND THE CHURCHES

Drawing: Peter Murray

16: Ballingrane Methodist Church



Set among the fields of West Limerick, with only a railway station and a few houses nearby, this is one of the oldest Methodist chapels still in use in Ireland. There is some doubt as to whether it is the third or fourth chapel here, but it was originally built in 1766 on land which had belonged to Barbara Heck's husband, Paul, before they emigrated

to New York. It has since undergone extensive renovation, particularly in 1885, and the Communion Table is now at the end opposite to its original location. Ballingrane was the principal settlement of the Palatine refugees in Ireland in 1709, and the present congregation are their descendants.

In the Church is preserved the original

cow's horn which was used in the early years to summon the Palatines from the fields when John Wesley or his preachers arrived. Nowadays people gather at an appointed time; things were more flexible in the 18th century. The font was made from the timber of a beam in Barbara Ruttle Heck's home, removed during alterations to the house, and incorporates panels from the pear tree under which Wesley preached.

Two polished granite tablets in the church commemorate Philip Embury and Barbara Heck, the pioneers of American Methodism, whose birthplaces are within half a mile of the building. A third commemorates Thomas Walsh, who was born three miles away, and received his first schooling in Ballingrane.

In 1888 the surrounding ground was laid out for use as a graveyard, one of the few attached to an Irish Methodist Church. Among the local Palatines three Methodist ministers were buried, including the historian Dr William Crook. The attractive little hall was added in 1968.

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